

November 6, 2017

The Honorable Rodney Frelinghuysen, Chairman  
House Appropriations Committee

The Honorable Nita Lowey, Ranking Member  
House Appropriations Committee

The Honorable Thad Cochran, Chairman  
Senate Appropriations Committee

The Honorable Patrick Leahy, Ranking Member  
Senate Appropriations Committee

The Honorable Robert Aderholt, Chairman  
House Agriculture Appropriations Subcommittee

The Honorable Sanford Bishop Jr., Ranking Member  
House Agriculture Appropriations Subcommittee

The Honorable John Hoeven, Chairman  
Senate Agriculture Appropriations Subcommittee

The Honorable Jeff Merkley, Ranking Member  
Senate Agriculture Appropriations Subcommittee

Dear Chairs and Ranking Members:

As you prepare to finalize appropriations legislation for FY 2018, we write to urge your support for including Section 755 of the Senate Agriculture Appropriations bill, which directs the Secretary of Agriculture to nominate an individual to fill the role of USDA Under Secretary for Rural Development. We further request that you support the inclusion of \$896,000 for the Under Secretary's office.

In May 2017, USDA announced that it intended to eliminate its Rural Development Under Secretary. USDA's decision to downgrade rural development and undermine its leadership structure is shortsighted and dangerous. Fortunately, the FY 2018 Senate bill includes language (SEC. 755) directing USDA to retain the Rural Development Mission Area and appoint an Under Secretary for Rural Development. The Senate bill also includes funding for the long-standing position.

Rural Development is an organization of 5000 people, 400 offices, and 40 programs, with a loan portfolio of \$216 billion dollars. In FY 2015 alone, USDA's Rural Business-Cooperative Service helped rural business owners and entrepreneurs create or save over 52,000 rural jobs; the Rural Utilities Service helped 5.5 million people receive new or improved electric facilities and 2.4 million people receive new or improved water facilities; and the Rural Housing Service provided over 140,000 new home ownership opportunities. Given its size and complexity, **USDA Rural Development requires an Under Secretary to ensure that the work of the agencies is coordinated and accountable to tax payers.**

Without the political leadership of an Under Secretary, agencies will tend to drift to separate agendas and difficult issues will go unresolved. Moreover, Rural Development deserves a seat at the table when high-level decisions are being made. As part of the USDA subcabinet, a Senate-confirmed Under Secretary can offer that leadership and political legitimacy. **We therefore urge you to adopt the Senate language retaining funding for the Office of the Under Secretary for Rural Development and directing the Secretary to appoint an individual to fill that position.**

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Agriculture and Land-based Training Association  
Alabama State Association of Cooperatives  
American Federation of Government Employees Local 3354  
Arkansas Land and Community Development Corporation  
Ashtabula, Geauga, Lake Counties Farmers Union - Ohio  
California FarmLink  
California Institute for Rural Studies  
Carolina Farm Stewardship Association  
Center For Rural Affairs  
Center for Small Farms & Community Food Systems - Oregon State University  
Certified Naturally Grown  
Community Alliance for Family Farmers  
Community Food and Justice Coalition  
Contract Poultry Growers Association of the Virginias  
Cottage House - Alabama  
Dakota Rural Action  
Delta Land & Community  
Desert Forge Foundation  
Family Farm Defenders  
Farm Aid  
Farms Not Arms  
Farm to Table New Mexico  
Farming 4 Justice – North Carolina  
Farmworker Association of Florida, Inc.  
Federation of Southern Cooperatives / Land Assistance Fund  
Food for Maine's Future  
Friends of Family Farmers  
Friends of the Earth  
Hmong National Development Inc.  
Housing Assistance Council  
Island Grown Initiative  
Indian Nations Conservation Alliance  
Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy  
Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future  
Kansas Rural Center  
La Montanita Cooperative  
Land Stewardship Project  
LiveWell Colorado

Maine Farmland Trust  
Michigan Food & Farming Systems  
Mississippi Association of Cooperatives  
Missouri Rural Crisis Center  
National Association of Development Organizations  
National Association of Towns and Townships  
National Family Farm Coalition  
National Farm to School Network  
National Hmong American Farmers  
National Latino Farmers & Ranchers Trade Association  
National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition  
New Mexico Food and Agriculture Policy Council  
Northern Plains Sustainable Agriculture Society  
Northwest Forest Worker Center  
Ohio Ecological Food and Farm Association  
Oklahoma Black Historical Research Project, Inc.  
Organic Farmers' Agency for Relationship Marketing  
Organization for Competitive Markets  
Pesticide Action Network  
Roots of Change  
Rural Advancement Fund of National Sharecroppers, Inc.  
Rural Coalition / Coalición Rural  
Rural Development Leadership Network  
Slow Food USA  
Somali Bantu Community of Lewiston Maine  
State Agriculture and Rural Leaders  
Sustainable Food Center – Texas  
Taos Country Economic Development Corporation  
Texas/Mexico Boarder Coalition  
The Center for Family Farm Development, Inc.  
The Common Market – Philadelphia  
Union of Concerned Scientists  
West Virginia Food and Farm Coalition  
Western Sustainable Agriculture Working Group  
Winston County Self Help Cooperative - Mississippi  
World Farmers

